HANDBOOK

Critical Library Pedagogy

Volume 1

ESSAYS AND WORKBOOK ACTIVITIES

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CHAPTER 8*

Loading Examples to Further Human Rights Education

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ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS OFTEN STRUGGLE against the limited amount of time we have with students relative to the learning goals we have for information literacy. In addition, we serve as guest instructors in our typical course-integrated instruction sessions. We are challenged to engage the library's information literacy curriculum while at the same time focusing on the learning goals of the course in which the instruction is integrated. While this is already a complex set of considerations, I would like to propose that we intentionally address additional learning outcomes through the examples we select for demonstrating search strategies and tools. My conviction that we should take this opportunity emerged in a human rights education graduate seminar in which the professor emphasized individual responsibility for collectively supporting "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." By "loading examples" through thoughtful selection of terms and resources, librarians can pursue human rights education, which is well-aligned with campus learning goals for multicultural awareness, global perspectives, diversity, and so on.

A Universal Obligation to Human Rights Education

In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (UDHR):

> As a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.[1]

In other words, respect for human rights requires, and individuals and institutions are required to take responsibility for, furthering human rights and the respect thereof through instruction. Though the Declaration lacks specifics as to how such teaching and education should occur, individuals as well as institutions are responsible. Additionally, one can infer from the Declaration that the acts of an individual, though likely to affect fewer people, are as welcome and important a part of teaching and educational efforts as the potentially larger scale efforts of institutions and governments.

While this is admittedly a weighty burden to place on *every* individual, that weight prompted me to reflect on my own responsibilities as an educator. Academic librarians, particularly those in the United States, enjoy a position of professional privilege to engage in human rights education. Our institutions value intellectual and academic freedom (though they do not always succeed in achieving their ideals) and do so against a backdrop of sociocultural values of and constitutional protections for individual freedoms, particularly freedom of speech. Faculty members, especially those who are tenured, have great freedom in expressing ideas and arguments. Academic librarians often hold faculty appointments in their institutions,[2] further affording them academic and intellectual freedom protections. Maria Accardi argues that this status offers "freedom to experiment with critical instructional methods and assessment strategies."[3] I agree. I believe that we who enjoy relatively greater respect for our own human rights have an obligation to provide human rights education.

The core values of librarianship serve as a foundation for practice and touch points for policy and decision making. Such values include access, privacy and confidentiality, intellectual freedom, the public good, and social responsibility.[4] These values inform librarianship codes of ethics, such as the one

articulated by the American Library Association.[5] The core values and ethical codes of librarianship clearly support furthering human rights through teaching and education.

In addition to the directive in the Declaration, which calls for engagement in teaching and education, librarianship can also find its purpose and responsibility in the concept of information rights as articulated in Article 19:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.[6]

Indeed, the IFLA *Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers* specifically invokes this article in its preamble.[7] The very existence of libraries is one way that society enables respect for human rights. The access to information that libraries provide empowers individuals to pursue other articulated rights, for example, education and cultural life, as well as to engage in human rights education for others.

Librarianship Practice and Human Rights Education

In addition to supporting human rights through their very existence, libraries offer mechanisms for librarians to engage in human rights education. The most obvious of these is the provision of collections, including materials specifically about the topic of human rights, but also through carefully curated selections that reflect diversity of perspectives, global context, and so on. Though at times controversial, these collections offer scholars and students opportunities to think deeply and carefully about human rights issues.

Librarians also create displays and exhibitions as well as sponsor speakers and symposiums that connect collections with contemporary social and political issues. Likewise, library practices that protect user privacy and intellectual freedom respect human rights and provide an educational opportunity when these policies are articulated to users. As an example, library users are often surprised to discover the degree to which libraries implement procedures to keep a person's checkout history private.

Beyond these more obvious ways that librarians can further human rights education, a library's instructional programs create opportunities. Academic librarians teach workshops, guest lecture in campus courses, and provide one-on-one research assistance and training for library users. Direct instruction is

a possibility, such as workshops that teach explicitly how to search for information related to human rights; however, these will reach only a small proportion of learners who are already interested in the topic.

The foundation of furthering human rights education in library instruction programs should be the adoption of pedagogies that respect the human rights of learners by minimizing fear and supporting intellectual freedom and agency. Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Henry Giroux have emerged as the critical theorists with which most academic librarians engage in the United States. For those librarians who take a progressive education perspective, John Dewey is the most prominent educational philosopher. I have found that, by adopting liberating and empowering instructional practices, librarians demonstrate respect for learners and model the social interactions envisioned in "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Information Literacy and Human Rights Education

In considering human rights education in more depth, I have found myself focused on the library's formal curriculum, that is, on information literacy. In the seminal report on information literacy and libraries, information literacy is defined as the ability "to recognize when information is needed and… to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."[8] The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* offers an expanded definition that echoes the original while highlighting the reflective and social nature of information literacy:

> Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.[9]

The specific learning goals for an undergraduate information literacy curriculum are detailed in documents such as the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, which states that the information literate student:

1. determines the nature and extent of the information needed
2. accesses needed information effectively and efficiently
3. evaluates information and its sources critically and in-

corporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system
4. uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
5. understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally[10]

These learning goals already reflect a certain commitment to human rights, in particular the final standard relating to ethical and legal issues. In practice, this final outcome is often narrowed to a focus on citing sources and avoiding plagiarism rather than more expansive considerations of equal access and privilege. This narrowness is exemplified in the AAC&U *Information Literacy VALUE Rubric*.[11] Recent work with the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, however, shows promise that librarians are considering more critical aspects of this learning goal, including a proposed additional frame on information social justice.[12]

Choosing to highlight more expansive considerations is not always easy in the classroom, but I find that when I do so, both the students and I are more engaged. Navigating the expansiveness is complicated. The library's information literacy curriculum is uniquely pursued in the context of other campus curricular goals because most library instruction is enacted through the one-shot session. Librarians typically teach at the invitation of faculty members in the context of their courses. As a result, the librarian must integrate information literacy learning outcomes with learning outcomes for the course. Adding considerations of human rights education presents a further integration challenge.

The Unique Opportunity of Examples

In light of this complexity, I asked myself: is there really the possibility of embedding human rights education into all, or at least the majority, of instruction sessions? Though the question is a bit daunting to consider at first, I have concluded that, through careful preparation, it is possible.

In teaching search strategy and tools, I almost always use example topics and specific known items. Every librarian I have observed does this. The examples must be relevant to the course content and cannot confuse or distract learners, but within these broad parameters we have a great deal of latitude in selecting examples. Interestingly, I have yet to find any pedagogical materials in the field of library instruction on how to develop examples. I suspect that, if asked, most librarians would state that they use examples based on course

content, the assignment the students are doing, their own personal familiarity with the topic area, and—because our instruction is typically developed with relatively minimal time for planning—whatever comes to mind easily and quickly.

Examples convey messages about values and the importance of certain topics. This is true whether the examples are intentionally chosen to do so or inadvertently do so. I would go so far as to claim that there is an ethical responsibility to be intentional about examples because examples convey messages beyond their utility for demonstrating strategy or tools. Because such is the case, intentional choice is a possible mechanism for furthering human rights education.

I can make the case for being intentional in the context of an institution's curriculum as well. It is typical for higher education institutions to articulate general education learning outcomes. Such statements are likely to include mention of valuing multiculturalism, diversity, tolerance, global perspectives, or the like, and human rights education aligns with such learning outcomes. In selecting examples that reflect human rights topics, I not only further information literacy and course learning outcomes but also contribute to my institution's overall general education learning outcomes.

Librarian Preparation and Willingness

Loaded examples have to be not only theoretically possible but also practically achievable to make the case for the feasibility of this practice. Librarian preparation and willingness are crucial. I must admit I have encountered resistance to this idea from other librarians. Some resistance is rooted in opposition to increased workload, but other concerns arise from questioning how this practice aligns with our professional values.

For library workers who hold a master's in library science, it is reasonable to assume an understanding of professional values and ethical principles. The accreditation guidelines for master's degree programs require that "Program objectives are stated in terms of student learning outcomes to be achieved and reflect…the philosophy, principles, and ethics of the field" and that "the curriculum provides, through a variety of educational experiences, for the study of theory, principles, practice, and values necessary for the provision of service in libraries and information agencies and in other contexts."[13] For those working in libraries without professional training, in-house training programs orient staff to these values and library policies.

What is less reasonable to assume is that all librarians have had preparation for the instructional role. Not all library schools offer a course in instruction,[14] and only the University of Washington requires it as a core course.[15]

The values and ethics of librarianship are a firm foundation for understanding human rights and the importance of human rights education; however, given the lack of teaching preparation, many academic librarians bring a technical skills training perspective to information literacy rather than a pedagogical perspective based in student learning and development.

A further complication to librarian engagement in human rights education is the prominence of the concept of "neutrality" in our professional discourse, which asserts that the role of the library is to provide information and not to make judgments. One library science graduate student whose teaching philosophy was grounded in critical theory confided to me that she was told to "tone down" her examples for subject and title searches in the workshop outlines she was developing because they were not "general" enough ("general" being code for "neutral" in this case). Human rights education is, however, decidedly not neutral.

The Progressive Librarians Guild and the Social Responsibilities Round Table within the American Library Association are the most prominent critics of the neutrality claim, arguing that librarians continuously engage in acts of representation, judgment, and privilege in their professional work. These librarians point to subject terms like *Indians of North America* and *Primitive Societies* (official Library of Congress subject headings) as obvious cases of judgment and representation from particular perspectives. This perspective is countered by the predominant professional rhetoric that these controlled vocabularies are just a tool for organizing information and not reflective of a particular sociocultural framework, that is, that they are neutral.

As a result, I find that a willingness to take a human rights education approach to selecting examples in information literacy instruction sessions hinges on an individual librarian's negotiation of the tensions in their own professional values, ethics, and discourses.

The Practicalities of Loaded Examples

Of course one must consider the pragmatics of choosing examples that intentionally focus on human rights. I take as a starting point that such examples must be appropriate to the course content and not distract from the matters at hand. To do otherwise would be disrespectful to the professor who has invited me and an inappropriate exercise of the privileged position I have as an expert guest speaker. But how exactly do I develop "loaded examples" in an intentional way to further human rights education or other related general education learning outcomes?

At a minimum, regardless of discipline, I include authors who are female or from diverse backgrounds. Adding the term *ethics* or *ethical* to a search will

often bring out human rights aspects of a topic. Directing students to resources such as *Ethnic Newswatch* and the *Alternative Press Index* will also expand their understandings of how power relations are impacting policy and decision making. Finally, discussion of the examples—of who has the ability to publish their views and be heard and who does not—prompts students to reflect on aspects of information as a human right. I find that students are often astute observers of these dynamics, providing critical perspectives on aspects of scholarly communication such as peer review, even if they do not use the professional jargon of academia.

Nonetheless, not all topics lend themselves to inclusion of the more powerful examples. When students research topics in the social sciences or explore sociocultural aspects of a topic, loaded examples are relatively easy to generate. They are inherent in the topics themselves. In other courses—particularly those in business or the sciences—it can be challenging to find examples that are on topic and also engage human rights education issues. In such instances, I ask students to reflect on the processes of how knowledge is recorded and disseminated and how that knowledge is challenged and negotiated over time. For even the most technical of topics, including sources by female authors as examples is almost always an option. Or, if it is not, that fact can be a topic of discussion.

Conclusion

The examples used in library instruction programs have received little attention in our professional literature and are an overlooked component of our instructional planning. Yet examples constitute a message about values and the importance of certain topics. Examples privilege ideas and bring awareness to them. I believe that librarians, through intentional choice of examples, can use these teaching moments to integrate human rights education into their existing instructional practices. Doing so aligns the library's instructional programs with campus learning outcomes for diversity and multiculturalism though it requires librarians to navigate the tensions in the profession related to the conflation of freedom and neutrality.

Notes

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